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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000469

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: STRANGE BEDFELLOWS: SPDC AND NLD COMMUNE ON SHAN EXILES

REF: A. RANGOON 460

[B](#). RANGOON 196

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In a highly unusual gesture, the GOB reached out to the NLD leadership on April 21 to request permission to publish the party's recent statement on its policy toward ethnic nationalities and secessionist movements. The party not only agreed, but was buoyed by a first-ever encounter with a GOB cabinet ministry. NLD Secretary and Spokesman U Lwin viewed the GOB as having "left the door open for future conversations" and he acknowledged that the NLD and the SPDC have some issues in common. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On the evening of April 21, NLD Secretary and Spokesman U Lwin debriefed us on his unusual encounter earlier in the day with senior GOB officials. According to U Lwin, police Special Branch agents arrived mid-day at NLD headquarters in Rangoon and politely invited him to the Ministry of Information. U Lwin was taken aback; the Burmese regime has essentially ignored the NLD for the past year and previous efforts to contact the party had always been undertaken by the now-defunct Military Intelligence (MI). U Lwin readily agreed to the offer and was escorted to the Ministry in an official GOB motorcade.

[1](#)3. (C) At the Ministry of Information (MOI), U Lwin met with several senior officials, including a Director General-level officer in charge of broadcast media. The official said that the GOB had appreciated the NLD's April 19 statement declaring that Burma's States and Divisions must never secede from the Union (ref A) and requested the NLD's permission to publish the statement in the official press.

[1](#)4. (C) The MOI official further noted that the Minister of Information would hold a press conference on April 22 addressing a recent exile-based declaration of independence for the "Federated Shan States" and also requested the NLD's permission to use the party's statement at the conference. U Lwin said he agreed to both requests on the basis that the NLD statement had been issued for public consumption. He reiterated to us that it remains NLD policy "to oppose any move to establish a parallel government or otherwise undercut efforts aimed at achieving a true and genuine Union" (see reftels).

[1](#)5. (C) On April 22, the GOB published the NLD statement in the official regime newspaper "The New Light of Myanmar." Also published on April 21 and April 22 were similar statements from numerous cease-fire groups, government organizations, and GOB-affiliated associations "totally opposing and condemning acts and aims of renegade Sao Hkam Hpa, his group, and his cohorts."

Comment: Something(s) in Common

[1](#)6. (C) According to NLD senior officials, the Ministry of Information's overture was the first time any GOB cabinet ministry has reached out to the opposition party - and the first time in over a year that the regime has approached the NLD on an issue other than security or to curtail the activities of party members. U Lwin was clearly upbeat on the encounter and concluded that the GOB had "left the door open for future conversations." He was not optimistic that a genuine political dialogue was imminent, but he did say "we (the NLD and the SPDC) do have some issues in common."

[1](#)7. (C) U Lwin acknowledged that the SPDC is giving undue attention to the declaration of independence by a relatively obscure Shan exile. Indeed, the regime has been running its propaganda machine full speed for the past three days. Although we do not yet have a read-out of the MOI's April 22 "press conference," we expect this exercise perpetuated an ongoing campaign, commenced in February, to snuff out nascent moves among some ethnic leaders to unify ethnic political and military movements.

[1](#)8. (C) Despite the NLD's satisfaction at the GOB's decent treatment, we don't believe that the regime has any intention of drastically altering its antagonistic relationship with the democratic opposition. The SPDC's favorite excuse for 40-plus years of military dictatorship is to "preserve the

Union." Any chance to play up threats to the Union, no matter how hare-brained or quixotic, underscore the continued necessity of military rule - at least in the minds of the senior generals. End Comment.
Martinez